

I claim:

1 1. A surgical apparatus, comprising:
2 a relatively short, relatively stiff shaft defining a distal region and
3 a proximal region; and
4 a tissue stimulation element associated with the distal region of
5 the shaft.

1 2. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least a
2 portion of the shaft is malleable.

1 3. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:
2 a flexible tissue engagement device associated with the distal
3 region of the shaft;
4 wherein the tissue stimulation element is on the flexible tissue
5 engagement device.

1 4. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the tissue
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode.

1 5. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the tissue
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1 6. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the distal
2 region of the shaft does not include a coagulation element.

1 7. A surgical apparatus, comprising:
2 a tube defining a proximal region and a distal region;
3 a suction device associated with the distal region of the tube;
4 and
5 a tissue stimulation element on the suction device.

1 8. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the tube
2 comprises a flexible tube.

1 9. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the suction
2 device comprises a flexible suction device.

1 10. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the suction
2 device is substantially cup-shaped.

1 11. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the tissue
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode.

1 12. A surgical apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the tissue
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1 13. A surgical method, comprising the steps of:
2 inserting a tissue stimulation element carried on a relatively
3 short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient; and
4 stimulating tissue with the stimulation element.

1 14. A surgical method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the
2 step of:
3 placing the distal region of the relatively short shaft directly
4 against tissue.

1 15. A surgical method as claimed in claim 13, wherein the step of
2 inserting a tissue stimulation element comprises inserting a stimulation
3 electrode pair carried on a relatively short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient.

1 16. A surgical method as claimed in claim 13, further comprising the
2 step of:
3 monitoring tissue in spaced relation to the stimulated tissue.

1 17. A surgical method as claimed in claim 16, wherein

2 the step of inserting a tissue stimulation element comprises
 3 inserting first and second tissue stimulation elements carried on a relatively
 4 short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient;
 5 the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on
 6 one side of a lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and
 7 the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the
 8 other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1 18. A surgical method as claimed in claim 16, wherein
 2 the step of inserting a tissue stimulation element comprises
 3 inserting a first tissue stimulation element carried on a first relatively short,
 4 relatively stiff shaft into a patient and inserting a second tissue stimulation
 5 element carried on second relatively short, relatively stiff shaft into a patient;
 6 the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on
 7 one side of a lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and
 8 the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the
 9 other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1 19. A surgical method, comprising the steps of:
 2 positioning a tissue stimulation element against tissue;
 3 applying a suction force to hold the stimulation element against
 4 the tissue; and
 5 stimulating tissue with the stimulation element.

1 20. A surgical method as claimed in claim 19, wherein the step of
 2 positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises positioning a stimulation
 3 electrode pair against tissue.

1 21. A surgical method as claimed in claim 19, wherein the step of
 2 positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises positioning a suction
 3 device that carries a stimulation element against tissue.

1 22. A surgical method as claimed in claim 19, further comprising the
 2 step of:

3 monitoring tissue in spaced relation to the stimulated tissue.

1 23. A surgical method as claimed in claim 22, wherein
2 the step of positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises
3 positioning first and second tissue stimulation elements against tissue;
4 the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on
5 one side of a lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and
6 the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the
7 other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1 24. A surgical method as claimed in claim 22, wherein
2 the step of positioning a tissue stimulation element comprises
3 positioning a first suction device carrying a first tissue stimulation element on
4 one side of a lesion and positioning a second suction device carrying a
5 second tissue stimulation element on the other side of the lesion;
6 the step of stimulating tissue comprises stimulating tissue on
7 one side of the lesion with the first tissue stimulation element; and
8 the step of monitoring tissue comprises monitoring tissue on the
9 other side of the lesion with the second tissue stimulation element.

1 25. A surgical system for use with tissue, comprising:
2 a source of stimulation energy; and
3 a surgical apparatus, operably connected to the source of
4 stimulation energy, including
5 a relatively short, relatively stiff shaft defining a distal
6 region and a proximal region; and
7 a tissue stimulation element associated with the distal
8 region of the shaft.

1 26. A surgical system as claimed in claim 25, wherein the tissue
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1 27. A surgical system as claimed in claim 25, wherein the distal
2 region of the shaft does not include a coagulation element.

1 28. A surgical system for use with tissue, comprising:
2 a source of stimulation energy;
3 a suction source; and
4 a surgical apparatus including
5 a tube, operably connected to suction source, defining a
6 proximal region and a distal region,
7 a suction device associated with the distal region of the
8 tube, and
9 a tissue stimulation element, operably connected to the
10 source of stimulation energy, on the suction device.

1 29. A surgical system as claimed in claim 28, wherein the tissue
2 stimulation element comprises a stimulation electrode pair.

1 30. A surgical system as claimed in claim 28, wherein the distal
2 region of the shaft does not include a coagulation element.